



# *Schufan Yeh*

**Art Direction**

**Portfolio**

0211353770

[schufan\\_yeh1@hotmail.com](mailto:schufan_yeh1@hotmail.com)

# BUS DISPUTE

## Hopes rise of end to misery for passengers

Drivers plan to highlight \$35 million in regional council subsidies to Stagecoach

by **Mathew Dearnauld**  
transport reporter

Relief may be close for frustrated Auckland bus passengers, even though they face another day of disruption before the drivers' strike ends tonight.

Mediated pay talks resumed between union representatives and the Stagecoach company last night, as Aucklanders crumpled rail platforms and jammed roads yet again on their way home, in the absence of the region's main bus fleet.

The sides spent several hours in Labour Department mediation rooms before adjourning overnight, and will meet again this morning in the hope of making an announcement by about noon.

Combined unions advocate Gary Froggatt, indicating that possibility, described the talks as "interesting" but would say no more.

Whatever happens this morning in the seven-month pay dispute, it will be too late to spare Stagecoach's more than 70,000 passengers another 24 hours without buses, before the six-day strike ends tonight.

They also face more disruption on Thursday, from yet another stop-work meeting.

Unions representing about 900 drivers after the defection of several dozens others to individual agreements say they need a meeting either to vote on a negotiated deal, or to plan more action in the absence of a new pay offer.

Although the stop-work meeting will be held after the morning traffic peak, there is not yet any guarantee drivers will return to work from it, meaning afternoon school buses may not be able to deliver children home.

The drivers intend marching on the Auckland Regional Council's offices after the meeting if the dispute remains unresolved, given that about \$35 million of public money is spent annually on subsidising Stagecoach services.

Mr Froggatt allowed himself some optimism before last night's talks, saying: "There appears to be a willingness by Stagecoach to get this thing moving, so that's positive."

He disclosed earlier that the parties had been "frustratingly close" to reaching a deal at talks on Saturday. Stagecoach executive chairman Ross Martin said before last night's talks that although he was encouraged by the unions' agreement to meet his negotiators, "it is not going to be easy".

The company is losing about \$1 million from the strike, and said

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earlier that this would reduce the amount available for a wage rise.

Although Stagecoach has automatically lost subsidies as well as fares, Auckland City Council's transport committee wants the regional council's transport authority to consider tightening performance measures in future bus contracts to guard against more disruption.

Stagecoach's previous best offer to drivers was a \$600 cash sum in lieu of six months' backpay, and an hourly wage of \$15 now, to be followed by \$15.30 next year and \$16 in 2007.

The drivers have been battling for an immediate rise to \$16, but Mr Froggatt has said they may be prepared to accept \$15 with full backpay for a one-year deal.

Aucklanders were blessed with fine weather again yesterday, reducing gridlock, although many arterial roads were heavily congested.

Trains faced serious delays on the western rail line for several hours in the morning after one hit a car blocking tracks at Kingsland.

The car driver was unhurt as he was not in the vehicle when the empty train hit just before farm on its way to collect passengers from Waitakere, but the police took a blood-alcohol sample after finding him in a "disoriented" state.

They initially thought he may have taken a wrong turn off George St, but rail operator Connex understood the car stalled in the road and became stuck on the tracks while the man was trying to push-start it downhill.

Although the train's driving cab suffered only superficial damage, the car was a write-off and took more than half an hour to clear from the tracks, triggering a chain reaction of delays for several hours and making hundreds of passengers late for work or classes.

But Connex general manager Chris White said the rail system was otherwise standing up well under an 80 per cent temporary rise in petrolage.

The experience had shown that, once new rolling stock was bought and more double tracks laid according to transport authority plans, the network could easily cope with more than double its existing passenger loads in the next few years.



CROWDED OPTION: Passengers pile on to the train at New Lynn.

PICTURE / DEAN PURCELL

## Commuters hoping for resolution

Disruption a nightmare for some but a business bonus for others



**BEN VOYKOVICH**  
Owner of a Birkbeck cafe

"I've had a couple of people say they will continue using the trains."



**MAGRITTA STRULAK**  
North Shore

"I support the bus drivers. I'm getting really frustrated with Stagecoach."



**BALWANT SINGH**  
Downtown taxi driver

"We're getting more customers, especially small fares in the city."



**ROMANI JOSIA**  
Ritchies bus driver

"The company is putting extra buses into town. I support the Stagecoach drivers."



**CHRISTINE PATTISON**  
Waikato

"Considering the responsibility that they carry, they do deserve better pay."



**LYNDA GARRAWAY**  
Tirangi

"It's absolutely chaotic. The trains were so full that I ended up catching a RL."



**WES LACEY**  
Adelaide, Australia

"I've got mates who have come over and they're not going to come back."

by **Charlotte Woolard**

Hina Kikila told her children to stay home yesterday. Shuttling them to two different schools during the bus strike while also dealing with staff transport problems at the downtown Muffin Break cafe had proved impossible.

"I'm really frustrated," the Mt Albert resident said.

"They had to miss school because I was having staff problems. They really feel bad about it."

But as Auckland entered the fifth day of the Stagecoach bus strike, residents remained supportive of drivers who are demanding a higher pay rate — as long as the stand-off doesn't last too long.

"They have something very special to fight for," Papakura resident Pina Tamaki said as she waited for a train instead of his normal bus.

"But going on for a week — it's already too long for some."

The strike has been a nightmare for students who rely on Stagecoach

buses to get to school, but good news for some businesses.

"There used to be heaps of school buses, and now there's nothing," said Otaguluhi College student Rebecca Senaisisio.

She took the train to school yesterday.

Taxi driver Sanjny Ram said custom had almost doubled.

"Hopefully through tomorrow and that's it," he said, sitting with his cab parked in front of a bus shelter near the Glen Innes train stop.

Gars filled the lot next to the station, where drivers resorted to parking on yellow lines.

Some new riders found a shorter commute.

Hesham Elhahaby said his normal bus trip took between 40 minutes and an hour, while the train took about 10 minutes. But as a monthly pass holder, he's losing out on six paid days of rides.

He's not worried about that loss now, he said, but he would do something about it if it continued.

## Penalties advocated for bus contracts

Councillors say performance conditions may prevent strikes

by **Mathew Dearnauld**

Auckland City councillors are calling for tougher performance conditions to be considered for lucrative public transport contracts, to discourage crippling bus strikes.

The six-day strike by Stagecoach drivers due to end tonight has prompted the council's transport committee to ask the Auckland Regional Transport Authority what performance measures face private companies receiving hefty public subsidies.

Councillor Penny Seftiva, in pushing for the inquiry yesterday, told fellow committee members she did not want to pass judgment on the strike "but we don't want a repeat of this sort of dispute".

Deputy Mayor Bruce Hucker was less reserved, saying his sympathies were "clearly with the bus drivers".

"I think it's a hugely responsible job and I would like to see them being paid reasonable wages, and a \$1-an-hour increase is to me a reasonable claim," he said.

Dr Hucker said his majority group of City Vision and Labour councillors, of which Mrs Seftiva is one, strongly supported the drivers in their battle for "a living wage".

But Auckland Citizens and Ratepayers Now councillor Doug Armstrong said Dr Hucker's declaration was a reason for local authorities never to run commercial activities.

"Any wage claims these people make will have a huge impact on costs of rates to our ratepayers," he said, calling for a reinstatement of the union-busting Employment Contracts Act.

"It is entirely inappropriate for this council and the deputy mayor to make comments on the appropriateness of a \$1 wage claim. It is highly subjective. We should stay right out of it."

Mrs Seftiva said she had no wish to interfere in the Stagecoach dispute, but pointed to the impact on an important public service of the company's apparent inability to retain staff, despite receiving subsidies to run its operation.

She also persuaded the committee to push for a law change to allow local councils more control of the distribution of bus services through their communities, including commercially viable routes and not just those needing public subsidies.

"Our subsidised services are under our control but others run at will and we have no ability to control what streets they run up," she said.

Regional transport authority chief executive Alan Thompson said he believed the loss of subsidies during strikes was a powerful incentive for bus companies to reach pay settlements with their employees, but his agency intended reviewing performance measures in any case.

He told the Herald it would do so before contracts were signed for new western and central bus services from the middle of next year, and would consider if penalties or greater incentives should be introduced.

Stagecoach receives about \$35 million a year in subsidies, but has recently lost several North Shore routes to a competitor which pays drivers markedly lower wages.

Mr Thompson said the authority did not want to discourage established and stable bus operators from competing for contracts, by being too prescriptive as to how they delivered services, as long as these were reliable and safe.

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# Cash crunch hits services for elderly

## A damning report finds that the sector looking after aged people is in trouble

By Ruth Berry  
politics reporter

### Age-old problem

- Government health expenditure was \$8.6 billion in 2003-04.
- \$1.5 billion of it went on elderly and disabled support services.
- That group also used additional elderly and hospital care.
- The number of living aged over 65 is set to increase from 467,000 in 2001 to 600,000 in 2021.

Health boards facing limited funding growth, it says.

While some boards are coping by attracting resources from existing services, others are increasingly relying on family caregivers as they cut their own home-based services.

Modelled overcut by the Private Hospitals Association estimates the full cost of addressing the funding pressure would be in the hundreds of millions of dollars — a figure that government officials dispute, the report says.

But in the recommendations, the working party finds that in the medium term, that amount of money needs to be made available in policy settings or some modes of service delivery will almost certainly be required.

In the short-term, the working party agreed funding is required to address the safety of services.

In addition providers, unions and consumers consider that short-term funding is required to maintain timely access to needed services.

The lack of staff training was a significant issue, it found. The working party was formed after a meeting between ministers and the Nurses Organisation, the Council of Christian Social Services and the Services and Food Workers Union last November.

support services for the elderly and disabled are chronically underfunded, suffer huge workforce turnover and many are providing inadequate care, a new report says.

Hundreds of millions of dollars may be required to address the problem, corresponding yearly as the aged population continues to grow, the Government commissioned working party report on the issue finds.

The report was completed in February, but released by Associate Health Minister Peter Hodgson yesterday with a Cabinet paper outlining plans for Budget increases for the aged-care sector.

The amount of the funding increase was slashed out, and will be covered on Budget day, Thursday May 19.

But the damning report reveals the sector is now in considerable trouble and anticipates deepening problems as low unemployment and pay rises for nurses worsen its staffing problems.

An estimated 45,000 support workers, or caregivers, work in residential and home-based care for older people and those with disabilities.

Annual staff turnover for home-based support workers is 30 per cent and 28 per cent for residential care workers — and those figures are rising, the report says.

Unlike aged residential care, home support providers are not covered by the Health and Disability Services (Safety) Act 2001.

While a standard has been developed, it is not compulsory and many providers' would not meet requirements — a high priority issue which needs to be changed, the report finds. The division of funding for support services for the elderly is placing particular pressure on District

# Winter chill to take over from Indian summer

## Anticyclonic conditions to end, bringing showers on weekend

By Rosalind Macbrayne

Inevitably, the Indian summer is drawing to a close. Winter is on the way.

By the end of the month, and going into June, there will be more lows — the first arriving this weekend, says MetService weather ambassador Ben McDavid.

Apart from a chilly "practice run" on Anzac Day, anticyclones have been dominating for much of April and early May, bringing settled conditions, he said yesterday.

But soon we can expect several southwest wind changes as autumn moves into winter.

The anticyclones are forecast to be replaced by unsettled weather from low-pressure systems developing in the mid-Tasman Sea, he said. Each of these systems might deliver a day or two of rain with strong winds from the northerly quarter. The winds were likely to secure a mild start to winter for the North Island and the north of the South Island.

After several dry months, normal rainfall should return at last to the Far North.

Mr McDavid said the term "Indian summer," used to describe predominantly anticyclonic conditions, reportedly came from the practice of the United States and dated back to the 19th century.

Apparently the early native



BEACH WEATHER: The MetService says the summer was late starting but it lingered into April.

PICTURE: JAMES SHAPPEL

Indians chose that warm, calm time of the year as their landing season, believing the mild, hazy weather encouraged the animals out. MetService senior weather forecaster Ian Miller said the summer was late starting but lingered into

April. "We have had some nice mild spells. However, there have been some odd southerlies to remind us that winter is on its way and those have started to take a bit on these clear nights," he said. "But it doesn't look too bad for the next few days."

The ridge over much of northern and central New Zealand would weaken today and showers were forecast at the weekend. From about Sunday there would be rain over much of the North Island.

transient season, with increased frequency of colder spells traditionally in April and May "just to remind us that we can't escape winter".

— SEE ALSO  
Weather details — B6

# Qantas readies low-cost airline for Tasman route

## No-frills Jetstar shuttles are likely to take off next year

By Chris Davies  
aviation writer

The Qantas low-cost offshoot Jetstar is preparing to start flying the Tasman after less than a year of Australian operations.

The airline, set up to counter the Australian success of Virgin Blue, may start flying the highly competitive route to New Zealand next year. Australian media reports of a September start date for a Jetstar on the

Tasman seemed "a bit aggressive" said spokesman Susan Windaway, but he did suggest the airline would be flying in New Zealand soon. Details were still being finalised.

It is thought unlikely the Jetstar route will be part of any attack on Air NZ, but an attempt to copy the sort of cost-cutting it has pioneered on the Tasman.

Air NZ's Tasman Express was a way of driving costs down as low as possible, while still trying to keep

high-paying passengers on board. Goldman Sachs JB Wiers's head of research, Peter Sigley, said it was only a question of time before Qantas introduced Jetstar on the Tasman.

In Australia, Jetstar flies to such the same way as Air NZ's Freedom Air. High-yielding business routes, such as those between Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, are flown by Qantas but leisure flights — those leaving during working hours or going to holiday spots — are flown in

Jetstar planes. It has a "five seating policy" where instead of a floating seat numbers, coloured tags are handed out at check-in. Three groups are then called on to board, each picking their own seats. Check-in closes 30 minutes before take-off and anyone who is late must pay for a new flight.

Flights do not connect with other international services and Duffell food and drink must be bought.

Air NZ stopped last year in its attempt to "trim a price war" with Jetstar. "It's a price war," said Qantas spokesman Ian Miller.

Australian airline about ways of re-operating that would not anger some jetsetters.

Each airline are waiting for the full decision of Australia's Competition Tribunal before formalising a deal to share as much as is allowed. They are likely to be sharing a "code-share" arrangement, where prices are not fixed between the two, but ticketing and scheduling are.

If Qantas wants to start code-sharing, it cannot let quality levels become too different, as a new Tasman Jetstar service is likely to be like Air NZ than Freedom.

# Engineer ticks off Berrymans and Army

## Retired colonel wants military to admit failure to support young bridge designer

By Helen Tunstall  
Wellington reporter

An engineer who investigated the fatal collapse of an Army built bridge said King Country farmers Kelly and Margaret Berrymans should have seen it was wrong.

Retired colonel George Butcher yesterday issued 40 pages of documents providing more detail about why he thought the bridge failed 11 years ago, killing her husband Ken Richards.

Colonel Butcher has previously blamed both poor maintenance and the decision to use untreated timber on structural parts of the bridge for its col-

lapse. Now, in a lengthy statement, he has called for the Army as an institution to accept it failed to properly support the inexperienced engineer, who in 1986 led the design and construction of the bridge leading on to the Berrymans' farm.

Colonel Butcher compiled a report for the Army into the failure, which was released last week.

But he has now said he does not agree with the Army telling the owner in 1987 that in a "Naive and naive" there was nothing wrong in the entire construction of the bridge which might have led to its failure. The Solicitor-General is consider-

ing if there should be a new coroner's inquiry, after publicly questioning the Army's failure to tell the inquest about Colonel Butcher's findings.

Initially the coroner, who heard evidence about the bridge's decay, told the Army that it would be criticised because of the engineer's inexperience and for failing to put in place a proper maintenance programme for the Berrymans when they took over control of the bridge.

The Army responded by laying complete responsibility for maintenance on the Berrymans and denying there was anything wrong with the bridge's construction. The coroner accepted most of its submissions.

However, Colonel Butcher had already told the Army the decision to use untreated saproxy timber on trusses, which ran under the suspension

bridge, holding its weight, was wrong. Although the Berrymans bought the timber, the young Army engineer in charge, who has since disappeared, agreed to use it.

Colonel Butcher also criticised the Berrymans' failure to properly maintain the bridge, which they lease was in poor repair, and questioned Mr Richards' decision to drive over the bridge with a fully loaded ute against Mr Berrymans' advice.

Colonel Butcher has in his statement defended the Army engineer who designed the bridge and supervised most of its construction.

He said a system failure let the engineer and his soldiers down.

— SEE ALSO  
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● “Dad nailed in this one.... but it was too high for my picture of me, mum, dad and Brian.”

● “So, mum nailed in this one. But it was still too high.”

● “I nailed in this one but it was too low, so I decided to draw it on the wall instead.”



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"Kate is a budding artist so  
we let her paint her own room"



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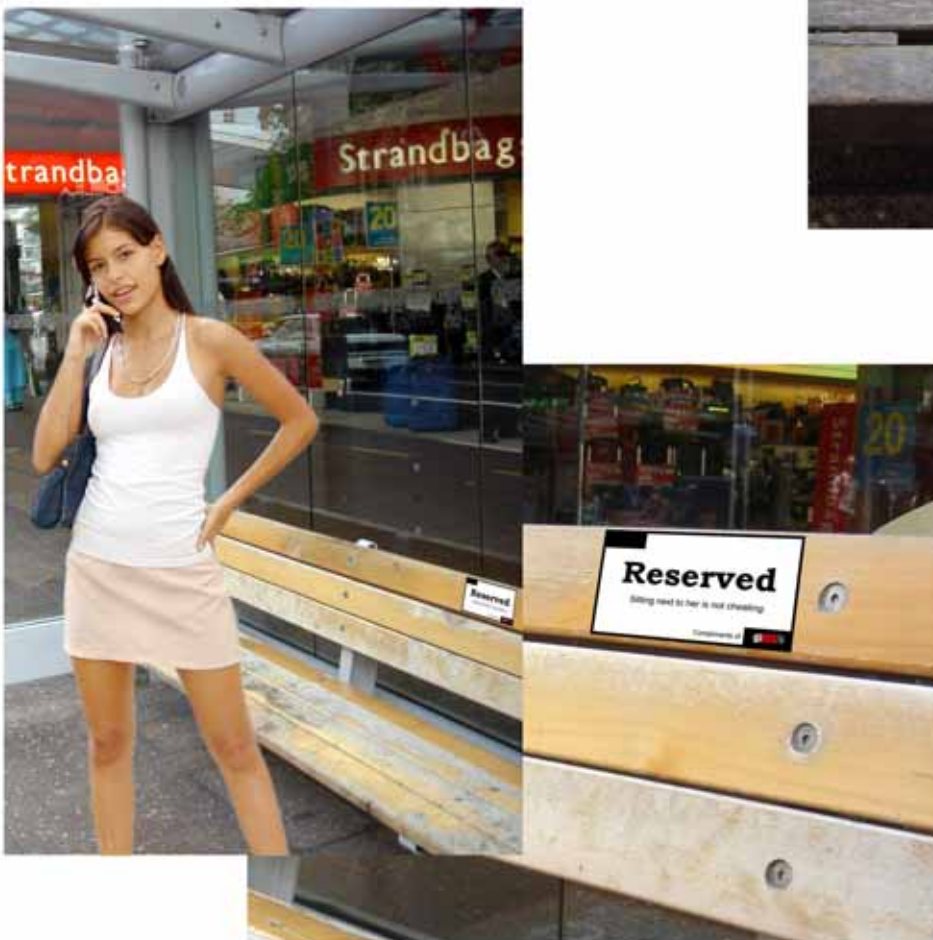
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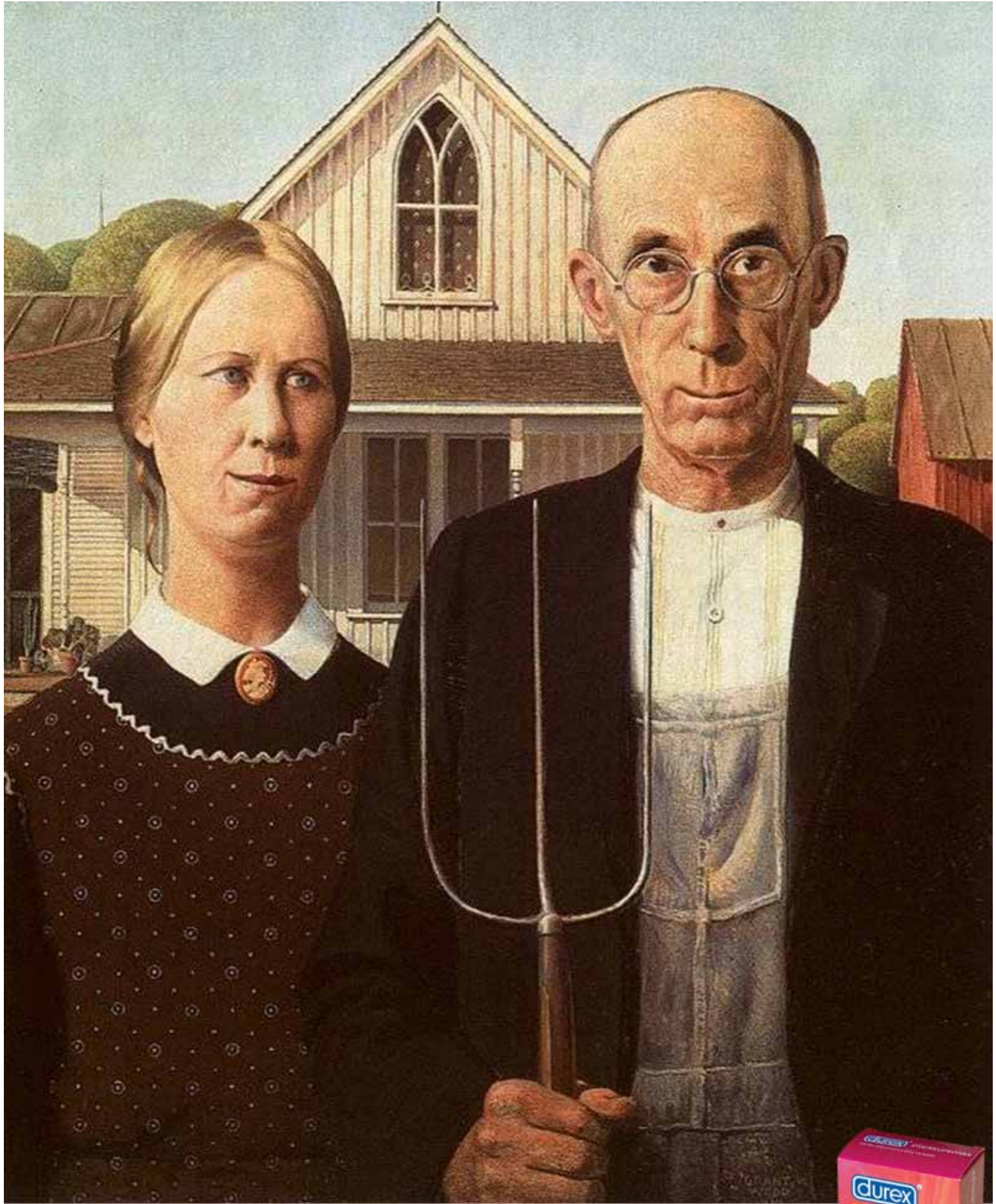
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